

## Analyzing Character Traits: Mac from *Etola's Keeper*, Chapter One

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Authors depict character traits through adjectives, verbs, quotations, thoughts to self (which are written using italics), and vivid descriptions (of physical appearance or actions, for example).

Go back to the author's specific descriptions of one of the characters in the novel you are reading. Read just the first chapter or first few chapters because you don't want to go overboard. Write an analysis of the character you have chosen using at least ten examples. Below, you will preview an in-depth analysis of a character named MacAlister from my novel, *Etola's Keeper*. Seeing I am the author of this novel, what I have written will be deeper than I expect from you, but hopefully this will clear up what comprises a strong character analysis.

### My very in-depth analysis...

"Ecstatic that his plan actually worked out"- Mac does not seem to have much self-confidence for some reason. He then impulsively shouted, which insinuates he is eager for potential approval from his teacher and/or classmates.

Mac has an archenemy named Eric Rollins who in this situation has captivated the attention of many in his classroom. The words discouraged and disgusted imply he is possibly quite jealous of Eric. Additionally, the circuit he got to work was a parallel circuit while his was simply a series circuit.

Resounding applause means Eric had an incredibly successful "breakthrough" of sorts. He privately refers to him as the "portrait of smugness and conceit", meaning he likely possesses the self-confidence Mac does not have. Mrs. Morris addresses him using a steely tone, which means she is not in-tune with his desire for approval. He stutters (choking out his words "in spats") because he feels intimidated and unsuccessful.

Mrs. Morris murmured, meaning she is most certainly not enthusiastic about his accomplishment.

### Chapter One

"Genius," Mac Shilling let out an exasperated sigh. "Brilliant."

Tucking a strand of chestnut brown hair behind his ear, he gently touched the end piece of his electrical wire to the bottom of his light bulb to illuminate it. Ecstatic that his plan actually worked out, he impulsively shouted out in the middle of fifth grade science class, "Mrs. Morris! I got the light bulb to work!"

Glancing over discreetly, he realized that his teacher and about seven other people were gathered around his archenemy, Eric Rollins, fascinated by how he was hooking up a parallel circuit. Glaring down at his series circuit, he felt discouraged and disgusted. All of a sudden, his work meant nothing.

Mrs. Morris came over about a minute later after Eric received resounding applause from his seven admirers. Eric, the portrait of smugness and conceit, looked quite content with himself. On the other hand, Mrs. Morris' facial expression was blank. "What do you have to show me, Mac?" she asked in a steely tone.

He felt as if he had swallowed an entire bottle of Elmer's glue and he could only choke out his words in spats. When his mouth opened, all he could stutter was, "U-u-um. I-i-i got my series circuit to w-w-work." His amazement was now non-existent.

She sighed, as if half-disgusted by Mac's efforts. "Please show me, then," she murmured.

He leaned down in front of the desk again and touched the end of the electrical wire to the light bulb, though this time nothing happened.

"That's too bad," she looked like she had not expected anything to

He says things before he thinks. Saying the light bulb potentially had **mystic powers** was not well-received in the least.

**"She had proven 1,752 times that she did not enjoy having him in her fifth grade class"** most certainly shows he has been let down by her on many occasions before. It is then mentioned that nobody listens to him, not even his parents, so he feels quite alone. He seems to be somewhat of an introvert, though he also seems to crave approval.

She refers to what he contributes in class as **"practical jokes"**.

A small twist in plot occurs when the reader realizes he has a treasured **"well-worn"** notebook in his possession that is his **well-kept secret**. He seems to be quite proud of his prose, which seems to relate to him in a way because he uses the words **"ordinary boy"** and **"fantastical hero"**.

He is not a grand orator- as the reader already knows, he stutters in the presence of his teachers and classmates. However, he writes extremely well- and even the word **"phenomenal"** is used to describe his story. He feels if his teacher ever got her hands on it, she would not believe it was original.

**"Snapped sternly"** means she is fed up with his **"antics"**. Sayings such as **"I will give you one warning and one warning only"** indicates her patience is short.

happen in the first place. "I guess you will have to perhaps work with it some more to get it to work." She then headed off.

Again, he fixated his eyes on the wire touching the light bulb, where it illuminated again. He called out her name and she turned around, though the light went out as soon as she saw it. He then muttered something incomprehensible under his breath and struck his desk in near-anger.

"I promise, Mrs. Morris! IT LIT!" he cried. "It's as if the light bulb has mystic powers or something. Like it knows to not work when you are around."

"Fine, then," she said in a quipping voice. She handed him another light bulb. "Let's use a light bulb that does not have 'mystic powers', then." She half smirked at him, and he felt disgusted that she was his teacher in the first place because she had proven 1,752 times that she did not enjoy having him in her fifth grade class. Yet they were stuck with one another because nobody liked or listened to him, anyway. Not even his parents.

He went to work the circuit again, yet again, it did not work. "Mac, it's not the light bulb. It's your configuration. On top of everything else, I am sick and tired of your practical jokes."

Mac felt his face flush, though not many overheard her. It didn't even matter that she was speaking to *him* in the first place, either. As soon as she stepped away, he pulled out a well-worn composition notebook out of his desk and flipped to a short story in his messy manuscript called "Ordinary Boy Becomes Fantastical Hero". He flushed again because he would never, ever show the story to someone like Mrs. Morris. It was like his well-kept secret that nobody would ever be let in on... but him.

Mac didn't have eloquent speaking skills, but he was an eloquent author. He knew how to find the perfect words to describe any character, setting, or challenge his characters had to face. Mrs. Morris, upon reading a story like *this*, as phenomenal as *this*, would probably believe he committed plagiarism.

His face was then buried in his book.

Mrs. Morris stood near him about fifteen minutes later. "I will give you one warning and one warning only, Mr. Shilling," she snapped sternly. He felt mortified as he shoved his book in his desk, intending to put it in his backpack later.

Thoughts to self are immensely valuable because they provide insight to one's true character. He describes quite a bit of his school experience as "stupid".

His classmates Morgan and Amy do not appreciate him because one murmurs that he **always stutters** while the other one refers to him as the "**definition of stupid**". He impulsively responds once more- and of course, they appear to be innocent. His classmates are then described as **startled** and **uncaring** that the two girls could have been treating him in an inconsiderate manner. Mrs. Morris is described as **oblivious** as well.

Mrs. Morris most certainly does not know or appreciate what is contained within his composition book and tries to dissuade him from bringing it, though that is all he has at this time in the story.

*Good grief, he thought to himself. If I could skip the remainder of fifth grade, all of middle school, and all of high school to become a famous author. If I didn't have to read stupid stories, complete stupid math problems, and learn about stupid people who apparently changed history forever. What were we learning about right now, anyway?* The day had rushed by in a blur.

"S-sorry," he stuttered. His thoughts had been bolder, but he would have wound up in detention on his toes.

She then leaned forward for a moment. "I was about to ask you to read the next paragraph about World War 2. However, you were involved in that book of yours."

"Uh-uh..." he dug through his desk to locate his textbook as quickly as possible. "Which page? Which paragraph? Uh..." He was freaked out that he daydreamed through the past five minutes without hearing anything.

He then heard Morgan Goff turn to her friend Amy Pfaff and whisper, "He *always* stutters."

Amy then muttered back, "It's because he is the definition of stupid."

His face then turned an insane shade of crimson. "I am NOT stupid!" he blurted out, impulsively as usual.

Mrs. Morris stared at him, oblivious to the two girls because they were sitting in their seats like the two most innocent girls on Earth. They were both "fixated" on their Social Studies books again.

"Excuse me?" Mrs. Morris glared at him.

"Amy j-just called me s-stupid," he pointed out.

The entire class looked both startled and uncaring at the same time. Amy looked the most startled of all.

"You have used your last chance," she responded, obviously irritated. Getting up and grabbing his books, he shoved them into his backpack. He also grabbed his composition book quickly and placed it in there as well.

"You are not bringing that book," she glanced at it as if it were made of gold.

He feels very strongly about the book because he responds to her without stuttering.

As soon as readers delve into the description of Etola, readers are privy to the fact it is indeed a fantasy world because it is described as a kingdom. It is described as a kingdom where good battles with evil. There is the strong, gallant force of King Ny'ole and the desecrating, evil force of Diomore.

Mac is a literary enthusiast, so he is actually quite intelligent. He just seems to be disinterested in the unnecessary things he must learn at school.

He is so involved in daydreaming about Etola that Diomore's army

"I most absolutely am," he said in a bolder tone without stuttering.

"I promise, I will complete my work. It's just going to be in my backpack." He quickly dashed out of the classroom, afraid of his book being taken or destroyed. That would destroy him. His book was all he had.

#### Detention

Etola. Thinking about his kingdom filled his heart with immense pride. In the back of his composition book were his sketches of the most beautiful places in his kingdom, and his descriptions were toward the front of his book. He didn't even need his book to start daydreaming.

King Ny'ole was a phenomenal leader with the courage of a gallant knight. He stood for all things right. Diomore, on the other hand, stood for all things evil. Sometimes, those in the kingdom could get under the curse of Diomore and commit horrible acts, but the sight of Ny'ole brought them to their knees.

Ever since he was young, very young, Mac was fascinated with books, particularly *The Chronicles of Namia* series by C.S. Lewis. He thought about Aslan and the White Witch and how their characters paralleled with Ny'ole and Diomore. What was different about his own land, though, was that Diomore did not turn the world to ice. He just made people feel guilty, and then they committed these acts that went against everything Ny'ole had ever taught them.

He never wrote about the Prince or Princess, or even the Queen. He didn't feel the need to. He was sure they existed, though. Somewhere in his thoughts. Entire stories could be written about Ny'ole and Diomore in itself without developing any other characters. Some of the people of the kingdom were developed. Brendon was Ny'ole's loyal servant. How he came up with these names, he was not sure, but just to let those names escape his lips gave him this satisfying feeling as the author.

Oh, and Diomore had an army of ogres who pick-pocketed, lied, vandalized, hypnotized, and even took lives. They were powerful, and it seemed like they were multiplying by the day. Ny'ole's ways were very traditional and basic. Diomore's ways seemed incredible at first, though they were deceiving and they only led his followers into a "black hole" of sorts. It's either those who resided in his kingdom adored or despised him.

He knew one thing, though, Diomore's army gave him the chills,

has given him the chills.

Mac is a repeat offender when it comes to being sent to detention. Mr. Oleander's usage of the phrase "What did you do this time, Mac?" indicates it in a major way.

He does not stutter around Mr. Oleander, which is interesting. He must not intimidate him as much as Mrs. Morris does. However, he holds Etola in such high regard he does not even let Mr. Oleander in on what gives him immense pride.

Mac actually prefers detention because it provides him with peace and quiet.

There are many adjectives that describe Mac's parents that are not all that appealing. "Unattainable" and not seeming to "acknowledge him as their son" provide a huge indication as to how he feels about his parents. They seem to be nonplussed whether he achieves or does something negative.

and they weren't even real outside of his composition book. Detention was led by Mr. Oleander, who knew him by name. Mr. Oleander was actually better than Mrs. Morris, but of course he could not go to detention every day. He was probably there twice a week, though.

"What did you do this time, Mac?" Mr. Oleander asked as soon as he stepped through the door. Mrs. Morris must have called him when he left the room.

Suddenly, the stuttering was gone. He only seemed to do it around Mrs. Morris and his classmates. "Well, there was this light. I was trying to set up a series circuit in class, and it wouldn't work whenever Mrs. Morris was around. I tried to tell her it had mystic powers, but she wouldn't believe me. I then pulled out a book (he didn't say which book because he was too embarrassed to admit what was in the book; not even Mr. Oleander could know) and read it during Social Studies. Actually, I only intended to read the book for a few minutes or so, but more time passed. Then a girl named Amy called me stupid, but of course nobody believed me then, either." He stared down at his feet.

He thought about past times he had been sent to detention- third grade when he busted open Andrew Payton's lip. That was perhaps the worst time. Now Mr. Oleander looked nonplussed.

"That's certainly a new one of your tales, Mac," Mr. Oleander said dryly. "A light bulb with mystic powers. Well, have a seat and get to work."

Nobody else was in detention that day. He was very lucky to have a quiet room to think on his own. He would hear random clanking from Mr. Oleander as he pulled out his coffee mug and filled it, but that of course was no big deal.

#### Family Values

Mac's parents were another story. They never showed emotion. They did not understand him. They were not caring. They were always occupied. They were unattainable.

His parents never asked him about school. They did not acknowledge when he got in trouble. They did not acknowledge when he got an award, which was not often, but it sometimes happened when he was younger. They did not listen to his ideas. They did not seem to acknowledge him as their son, for some reason.

His brother Dean is his parents' pride and joy. He is described as popular, knowing "how and when to say the right things", and well-spoken as well as one who "could do no wrong".

Dean is described as being wanted, and Mac is described as a mistake. That means in essence, Dean is appreciated and valued.

Mac is extremely curious as well- he is fascinated with the fact his father is a locksmith who has a key-duplicating machine in his possession.

"So he did not get any more failing grades" indicates he does not work to his potential because he is smart enough to pass the fifth and possibly the sixth and seventh grades as well. He does not seem to care about the Cs he has earned, overall, because they are referred to as "middle of the spectrum" and "respectable".

Mac is actually quite talented athletically with an "excellent arm", though it is never officially acknowledged.

He had one older brother, Dean, who was perfect. Dean was 17 and a senior in high school. Dean was a genius and the quarterback of the football team. Dean recently accepted a scholarship to an Ivy League college. He would be studying something like astrophysics. He was popular, knew how to and when to say the right things, and could do almost anything he put his mind to. He was well-spoken, unlike his younger brother. Dean could do no wrong. Dean, Dean, Dean.

When he was born, Dean was only 7, and he didn't really remember him before age 4, so he remembered Dean when he was about his age. He admired Dean, but Dean did not seem to admire him back. What was strange about Dean was that he was wanted, but it was clear that McAlister was a mistake. Nearly everyone knew it- their parents, grandparents, the neighbors, the neighborhood kids, even the people who ran the local cleaners.

Their family was not poor, but they were not rich, either. His father was a locksmith, and their garage was filled with keys of all shapes and sizes as well as a key-duplicating machine. For some reason, the keys always fascinated him. He imagined him opening different portals to different worlds. He dared to ever tell him that, though. His mother was a not-for-profit lawyer, which he never understood because money is important to so many people. Her job did not fascinate him in the least. Their jobs kept them busy, and supporting Dean in literally everything he did made them even busier.

Coming home from school, he worked on the homework Mrs. Morris assigned so he did not get any more failing grades. He was smart enough to pass the fifth grade, and perhaps the sixth and seventh as well. Nobody cared to know that, though. Since first grade, he had been a C student because either he decided to work harder, getting an A, or daydream, getting an F. C's fell into the middle of the spectrum and were respectable, so his method worked.

The only person who really spoke to him that night was Dean, and it was brief. He asked him to pass footballs to him outside, and he obliged. Otherwise, he would have to hear it from his parents. Mac actually had an excellent arm, though his brother never acknowledged it in words. He kind of did, though, by choosing him. He just stood there, throwing the ball back and forth, catching it, and throwing it again.

Everything was the same every single day. Nothing ever changed.

In writing my character analysis, I am looking back at specific phrases and words I highlighted in my notes from the past six pages. I am placing them in categories. Since I want to avoid plagiarism and not sound too much like the author, this skill helps me to form original inferences. I also want my analysis to be multi-dimensional and focus on several aspects of Mac, not just one.

<p><b>Describing Mac's thoughts and actions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecstatic that his plan actually worked out</li> <li>• Impulsively</li> <li>• Discouraged</li> <li>• Disgusted</li> <li>• Choking out in words in spats</li> <li>• Mystic powers</li> <li>• A mistake</li> <li>• "So he did not get any more failing grades"</li> <li>• Middle of the spectrum</li> <li>• Respectable</li> <li>• Excellent arm</li> </ul>	<p><b>Describing how others treat him:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steely tone</li> <li>• Murmured</li> <li>• Had proven 1,752 times that she did not enjoy having him in her fifth grade class</li> <li>• Practical jokes</li> <li>• Snapped sternly</li> <li>• "I will give you one warning and one warning only"</li> <li>• Always stutters</li> <li>• "Definition of stupid"</li> <li>• Startled</li> <li>• Uncaring</li> <li>• Oblivious</li> <li>• "What did you do this time, Mac?"</li> <li>• Unattainable</li> <li>• Did not seem to acknowledge him as their son</li> </ul>	<p><b>Description of others in his life:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resounding applause</li> <li>• "Portrait of smugness and conceit"</li> <li>• Popular</li> <li>• Knowing how and when to say the right things</li> <li>• Well-spoken</li> <li>• One who could do no wrong</li> <li>• Being wanted</li> </ul>	<p><b>Etola/his sketchbook:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well-kept secret</li> <li>• Ordinary boy</li> <li>• Fantastical hero</li> <li>• Phenomenal</li> <li>• The chills</li> </ul>
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**Here is a non-example of a character analysis:** Mac Shilling is not well-liked at all. His teacher, classmates, and parents underestimate and disrespect him. He also has low self-confidence as well. He doesn't try that hard in school and has a multitude of hidden talents. He daydreams about a land named "Etola" that he actually wrote about and drew in his beloved sketchbook.

**Example of a strong character analysis:**

Mac Shilling desires to be accepted. He feels negatively about his teacher, Mrs. Morris, because through a multitude of experiences, she had "proven 1,752 times that she did not enjoy having him in her fifth grade class". One day he felt he made an accomplishment in science class, though he could not get the configuration of his circuit to work in front of her and she referred to his efforts as "practical jokes". She snapped sternly, murmured, and spoke to him in a steely tone, telling him at her wit's end, "I will give you one warning and one warning only." He does not try his absolute best in school, earning "middle of the spectrum", "respectable" Cs on his report card (though he could pass the fifth as well as possibly even the sixth and seventh grade). However, he does not want to receive any more failing grades on assignments. Mrs. Morris diverts her attention to his archenemy, Eric, who received "resounding applause" for the circuit he configured, and classmates who are not even honest towards her.

He actually feels more accepted by the detention teacher, Mr. Oleander, who gives him the peace and quiet he desires.

Furthermore, his classmates disrespect him. One said he "always stutters" while another stated, "He is the definition of stupid." His parents also show a great deal of favoritism toward his brother Dean, who is "wanted", cannot do any wrong, well-spoken, and popular. He, on the other hand, has never really felt "wanted" or even acknowledged as their son. They are essentially disinterested in whatever he does, whether it's an achievement (which he rarely accomplishes) or something problematic.

From reading the first chapter in the book, he has a multitude of hidden talents as an artist, writer, and even when playing football outside with his brother. He has envisioned a phenomenal kingdom named "Etola" that he has sketched in a beloved sketchbook, developing a strong, virtuous King named Ny'ole and obstructive force named Diomore. He gets involved in the development of Etola so deeply that Diomore's evil army gives him the chills. The sketchbook is his "well-kept secret" that he will never share with anyone, not even the halfway decent Mr. Oleander.

Essentially, Mac is an imaginative boy with at least fairly good intentions who just seems to want to be accepted.